

**Evering – Reading Lab**  
**Communication Skills Department**

**MULTIPLE-CHOICE QUESTIONS**

How do you feel about multiple-choice questions on tests?

Some students prefer essay questions because they can show how much information they know by providing a written explanation. However, some don't like essays because they are never sure how much they have to write.

Some students like multiple-choice questions because the correct answer is in front of their faces. On the other hand, others find it confusing to have to look at and distinguish between all of the different choices.

As a college student, you will be asked to take tests in a variety of formats. Sometimes you will have options but at other times the format will be chosen for you. The ACT Reading Test is given in a multiple-choice format. As previously stated, the biggest benefit in taking a multiple-choice exam is the answer is given to you. Without even reading the passage, you have a one out of five chance (20%) of blindly guessing the correct answer.

You are probably used to looking for the right answer to a question. In multiple-choice tests, it is important to find the *best* answer available. This means you have to look at all of the choices and compare them before you choose your answer. Test makers design multiple-choice questions to have some answers that look good enough to distract you from choosing the correct answer.

**PROCESS OF ELIMINATION**

After reading the passage, you should be able to identify and eliminate some of the incorrect answers. As you get rid of incorrect answers, it gets easier to find the right answer.

- 1 answer/5 choices= 20%
- 1 answer/4 choices= 25%
- 1 answer/3 choices= 33%
- 1 answer/2 choices= 50%

You should be able to narrow down your guesses to at least 1 or 2 choices. If you are down to 2 choices you have a 50% chance of answering the question correctly.

We will look at five basic types of questions that the ACT will present to you. Knowledge of these types of questions will help you choose better strategies to find the support for your answers. There are other types of questions but understanding these five and the following strategies will improve your ability to take reading exams.

## **MAIN IDEA**

The main idea of a passage is a general statement that tells the most important point the author makes about the topic of the passage.

Strategy:

1. Read the entire passage.
2. Find the topic of the passage. - Ask, "What is the passage about?"
3. Find the main idea. - Ask, "What is the most important point the author makes about the topic?"
4. Check to see if you have found the correct main idea. – Ask, "Does the information in the passage support my main idea?"

### Be Careful!

1. The main idea will not always be directly stated in the passage. It may be implied or suggested. Following the strategy mentioned above is an excellent way to determine if you have found an implied main idea.
2. On the exam, sometimes the test makers ask for the main idea of the entire passage. At other times you may be asked for the main idea of a specific paragraph in the passage.
3. Do not choose a main idea that is too broad or too narrow. Broad choices cover more information than is explained in the passage. Narrow choices focus on specific details.

## **FACT/DETAIL**

A fact is a piece of information that can be verified from a source. The source of your answer is the passage.

Strategy: Go back to the story and find support for your answer.

### Be Careful!

1. Test makers will use synonyms and change the wording between the passage and the correct choice in the question.
2. Even though this is a reading test, background knowledge is also highly critical. You may need to already have some information before you start reading in areas such as mathematics.

For example, you should know some basic conversions from fractions to percentages.

$\frac{1}{2}$  = 50% = one half

$\frac{1}{5}$  = 20%

$\frac{1}{4}$  = 25% = one quarter, one fourth

$\frac{3}{4}$  = 75% = three quarters

$\frac{1}{3}$  = roughly 33% or (between 30 and 35%)

$\frac{2}{3}$  = roughly 66%

3. You may also have to look for an answer in more than one location in the passage.

## VOCABULARY

Words are the foundation of language. With well over 1 million English words, each with multiple meanings, you need understand a words meaning and how it is being used in the passage.

- Strategy:
1. Go back to the passage and find the sentence with the unknown word.
  2. Reread the sentence and the surrounding sentences to determine the context of the word.
  3. Use each of the choices in the sentence to see which word best fits the context.

### Be Careful!

1. Words have more than one meaning. Check the context even if you are familiar with the definition of the word.
2. Words have different shades of meaning. Two words can basically mean the same thing but one is a stronger example.
3. Knowledge of word parts—prefixes, roots and suffixes can be helpful.

## INFERENCE

An inference is a guess based on information you have observed. It can be a difficult question because it requires understanding the author's point of view. It is also called drawing conclusions or making judgments.

- Strategy:
1. Determine the main idea of the passage.
  2. Determine the author's purpose for writing the passage.
  3. Identify information in the passage to help you make your decision.

### Be Careful!

1. Inference questions are generally considered to be the most difficult type of question.
2. While not as straightforward as a fact question, there will be some support for your inference in the passage.
3. Think about the author's point of view not your own.

4. Make the smallest leap possible and select the most logical choice.
5. If you cannot find a good choice, base your answer on your own common sense.

### **NOT/EXCEPT**

You can think of this as a reverse detail question. In a typical detail question, you have 1 answer supported by the passage and 4 choices not supported by the passage.

In a NOT question, there are 4 choices supported by the passage. You are looking for the 1 answer not supported by the passage.

- Strategy:
1. Read the choices.
  2. Refer back to the passage locate support for each choice.
  3. Eliminate all the choices that have support.

### **Be Careful!**

1. The word “not” will be highlighted in the question. However, you may miss it the first time you read the questions. When you look at the choices if you notice that there is support for more than one choice, check to see if you are answering a NOT question.
2. Similar to FACT/DETAIL questions, synonyms may be used in the choices to make it harder to identify the support.
3. Just because a choice is mentioned in the passage does not mean it is adequately supported.